THE ATTRIBUTION OF CANDRAGUPTA-KUMĀRADEVĪ COIN-TYPE

S. R. Goyal

The attribution of the coins bearing the effigies and the names of Candragupta-I and Kumāradevī on the obverse, and the figure of a goddess seated on a lion along with the legend *Licchavayaḥ* on the reverse is one of the most controversial problems of the Gupta numismatics. As the legends on these coins refer to at least three parties—Candragupta-I, Kumāradevī and the Licchavis, *prima facie* it may be assumed that these were issued either by Candragupta-I alone, or jointly with the Licchavis and their princess Kumāradevī. Earlier numismatists such as Smith[1] preferred the latter alternative and their view held the field until Allan[2] challenged it. He attributed these issues to Samudragupta on the ground that they betray greater originality from the Kuṣāṇa prototype than the Standard and the Archer type coins of Samudragupta. According to him, Samudragupta, issued these pieces as medals in commemoration of his father and his own Licchavi descent. Allan's arguments have been examined in detail by Aiyangar[3] and Altekar[4]. Now, so far as the rejection of Allan's theory of the relative chronology of the Candragupta-Kumāradevī, the Standard and the Archer types based only on their comparative originality from the Kuṣāṇa prototype is concerned, we fully agree with these scholars. However, there is no need to repeat their arguments though we would

1. *IMC*, I, Pt. I, p. 95 ; *IA*, 1902, p. 258, fn. 7 ; *EHI*, p. 296.
2. *BMC*, Intro., pp. Lxiv-viii, Lxxiii-iv. He has been followed by R. K. Mookerji (*The Gupta Empire*, p. 30), S. Chattopadhyaya (*EHNI*, p. 143), S. V. Sohoni *JNSI*, XIX, Pt. II, pp. 145 ff.) and V. S. Pathak *Ibid*., pp. 135 ff.
3. *Ancient India and South Indian History and Culture*, I, pp. pp. 184 ff.
4. *Coinage*, pp. 26-32 ; *Bayana Hoard*, Intro , pp. XL–LII ; *JRASB*, III, Num. Suppl., XLVIII (1937), pp 105-11. Majumdar has followed him closely (*NHIP*, p. 128f.). Also see U. Thakur, *INC*, II, pt. I, pp. 35 ff.

like to discuss certain additional facts which indicate the degree of correctness of their view.

According to Allan, the late Śaka or Kuṣāṇa coins were not current in the territory which Samudragupta inherited from his father. They "belong to the North-West and are rarely found outside the Punjab. Were the Gupta coins a local development in Magadha of the late Kuṣāṇa coins from which they were obviously derived, one would expect the latter to be present in the finds of Gupta coins, just as we find the silver coins of Candragupta II and Kumāragupta I with their prototypes the coins of the Western Satraps. We must, therefore, place the origin of the Gupta coinage in a period when the Guptas had come into closer contact with the late Great Kuṣāṇas whose eastern (Punjab) coins they copy ; what historical knowledge we possess points to this period being, not in the reign of Candragupta I, but in that of Samudragupta"[1]. But this argument is hardly convincing, for, the non-availability of the Kuṣāṇa gold coins from the region where the early Guptas ruled, does not necessarily mean that they were not current in that area in the first half of the fourth century A. D. The analogy of the Roman coins of the early centuries of the Christian era are found in pretty good number in the regions south of the Vindhyas, while they are very rare in the northern part of the country despite the fact that the Roman influence on the Kuṣāṇa coinage is regarded as something beyond doubt. This fact has been explained on the assumption that in the north, the Roman coins were melted down by the Kuṣāṇas to mint their own issues, while in the Deccan, where the necessity of the gold currency was nol felt, they were usually defaced by an incision and allowed to be used as bullion.[2] In the same way, it may be assumed that the Guptas melted down the Kuṣāṇa gold coins available to them in order to use their own currency.

The relatively greater originality of the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type, so much emphasised by Allan, is more

1. Allan, *op. cit.*, pp. Lxvi.
2. Wheeler, M., *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers*, pp. 167 ff.

apparent than real. According to Allan himself, it is confined to "the addition of the figure of the queen on the obverse and the substitution of a lion for a throne on the reverse".[1] Now, so far as the depiction of lion on the reverse is concerned, Altekar has shown that it was not something quite unknown to the Kuṣāṇa coinage. "There is a coin type of the late Kuṣāṇa king Kaneshko, probably Kaniṣka III, issued in the third century, which shows the goddess on the reverse seated on a lion crouching to left (Pl. I. 7.) The style in which the goddess is seated on the lion and the way in which the shoulders are both closely similar to what we see on the coins of Candragupta I (Pl. I.8.10)".[2] In the light of this fact, this part of Allan's argument looses its force. As to the depiction of the queen along with the king on the obverse, it may be pointed out that strictly speaking this feature does not belong to the category of the steps taken by the Gupta moneyers to make the coinage of their royal masters more original. The process of freeing the Gupta coinage from foreign influence involved gradual replacement of the king's Kuṣāṇa coat and trousers by the Hindu-dress, the substitution of the standard by the *paraśu* or the bow, the transformation of Ardoxsho into Durgā or Lakṣmī and such other changes.[3] The introduction of the figure and the name of the queen was an innovation of entirely different type. It was unprecedented in the history of the Hindu coinage and remained something quite exceptional in the history of the Gupta numismatic art itself. Candragupta II and Kumāragupta I, no doubt, issued their own King-and-Queen type of

1. Allan, *op. cit.*, p. Lxv.

2. Altekar. *Coinage*, p. 31. The identity of the goddess depicted on the reverse has been a matter of great controversy. She has been variously identified with Durgā by Altekar (*Coinage*, p. 31) and Mookerji (*The Gupta Empire*, p. 33), with Lakṣmī by Allan (*BMC*, p. 8), with 'Annapūrṇā aspect of Ambikā' or as 'an adaptatation of Pallas Athene' by D. C. Sircar (*Sel. Ins.*, p. 254, fn. 1), with Rājalakṣmī by Chhabra (*JNSI*, XI, p. 27) and with Siṃhavāhinī Lakṣmī by R. K. Dikshit (*JNSI*, XXVI, Pt. I, pp. 104 ff.). Sitholey (*JNSI*, X, Pt. I, p. 27) has identified her with the queen Kumāradevī,

3. *Coinage*, p. 15 f,

coins, but they did not inscribe the names of their respective queens on them ; and, obviously, they did not mint such coins in appreciable numbers, for only one specimen each of their King-and-Queen type of coins is available.[1] The exceptional nature of the depiction of the figure and the name of the queen on the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type coins becomes quite certain by the fact that it was unquestionably related with the mention of the Licchavis, the in-laws of Candragupta I, on the reverse which, once again, is something completely unique in the history of the Hindu coinage. We, therefore, feel quite confident in asserting that these features of the coins under discussion should be regarded as something exceptional, and not a link in the chain of the process of freeing the Gupta coinage from foreign influence.

The peculiar features of the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type, in as much as they constitute a departure from the Kuṣāṇa prototype, may be very logically explained even if they are taken to be chronologically earlier than the Standard type coins of Samudragupta. Actually, the problem of the Kuṣāṇa influence on the early Gupta coins is not as simple as Allan asks us to assume ; it depended upon more than one factor. Apart from the availability of the Kuṣāṇa coinage, so much emphasized by him, the temperament of the various rulers, the occasion on which a particular type was issued, political necessities, regional influences and above all the skill and the background of the mint-masters must have played their respective roles in conditioning the extent of the Kuṣāṇa influence on the various stages of the evolution of the Gupta coinage. Therefore, the assumption that the Kuṣāṇa influence was constantly on the decline, cannot be accepted without reservations. In the context of the present problem, it may be particularly pointed out that before the empire-building activities of Samudragupta, the direct rule of the Guptas was confined roughly to the eastern part of the U. P.[2] Now, it is certain that

1. *Ibid.* pp. 138, 212.
2. In a paper submitted to the Indian History Congress, 1966, held at Allahabad, we have shown that the original state of the Guptas was situated in the eastern U. P. with Prayāga as its political centre while the Licchavi relations of Candragupta I belonged to

the Kuṣāṇas had ceased to rule over this area at least more than a century before the accession of Samudragupta. Therefore, if he (during the pre-digvijaya period of his rule) or his father Candragupta I intended to issue gold coins, they were bound to rely on the local artists who did not have much experience of minting in gold, but at the same time, were not psychologically bound with the Kuṣāṇa tradition. They, therefore, could introduce any exceptionally peculiar feature without any hesitation whatsoever. On the other hand, after the conquests of Samudragupta, the Scythian rulers of the north-west became not only the immediate neighbours of the Gupta emperor, but also his subordinate allies. Obviously, therefore, Samudragupta could, then, import skilled artists from the north-western region to man the growing demands of his mints. But such artists were necessarily bound with the conservative traditions of the Kuṣāṇa numismatic art. Thus, a sudden increase in the Kuṣāṇa influence on the Gupta coinage in the region of Samudragupta becomes not only a possibility, but a logical consequence of the expansion of the Gupta empire in the north-western direction.

From the above discussion it becomes quite clear that it is not necessary to regard the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type as chronologically later than the Standard and the Archer types of Samudragupta[1]; on the other hand, the likelihood of an increase

Magadha. The fact that the eastern U.P. has yielded most of the coins of Candragupta I, and as many as 14 hoards (as against 2 each from Bengal and Bihar) of the Gupta gold coins and 8 inscriptions of early Gupta period including the Allahabad praśasti of Samudragupta, the earliest and most important of all the Gupta epigraphs, suggests it very strongly. The statement of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa (Pargiter, DKA. p. 53, fn. 8) referring to the joint-state of the Magadhas and the Guptas (NHIP. p. 134) makes almost a certainty. It shows that in the eyes of the author of this work, the Guptas were different from the Māgadhas and that the latter were identical with the Licchavis who are known to have amalgamated their state with the Gupta kingdom.

1. It is interesting to note that on examination of relative gold content of some of the Gupta coins, S. K. Maity has concluded that Candragupta-Kumāradevī type appears to be the earliest, as the percentage of gold in the coins of this type is more than that in any other

in the Kuṣāṇa influence on the early Gupta coins as the result of the conquests of Samudragupta makes it possible to hold that the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type was issued earlier than the Standard type of Samudragupta, either by Candragupta I or by Samudragupta himself during the early years of his reign. As a matter of fact, there are certain facts which suggest this possibility quite strongly.

Firstly, the coins of Candragupta I-Kumāradevī type, except for a few isolated finds, have been discovered from the eastern part of the U. P., the region in which the early Gupta kingdom was situated. According to Altekar their "recorded find-spots are Mathurā, Ayodhyā, Lucknow, Sitapur, Tanda, Ghazipur and Banaras in U. P. and Bayana in the Bharatpur state[1]." On the other hand, the Standard type coins of Samudragupta are found throughout his empire 'from Saharanpur to Calcutta[2]'. It is a very significant fact, for, it shows that the type in question was issued when the Gupta kingdom was still confined to the eastern U.P. Had Samudragupra issued it after the issuance of the Standard type, as Allan asks us to believe, the specimens of the former would have been found throughout the empire like the coins of the Standard type.

Secondly, as is well known, the majority of the coins of Samudragupta, including those of the Standard type, contain metrical legends on the obverse. But on the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type coins no such legend is found; only the name of the royal couple are inscribed on them. Similar is the case with the *Garuḍadhvaja*, which is found on the both the Standard and the Archer type coins of Samudragupta (which were by far

type (*JNSI*, XVIII, Pt. II, pp. 187-97; *Economic History of Northern India in the Gupta Period*, p. 78). But the facts that each type was not limited to a particular time and that the gold content of the coins of the same type considerably vary, weaken this line of reasoning (Dani, A. H., *JNSI*, XX, Pt. I, p. 4-5).

1. *Coinage*, p. 26; however, the remark of Altekar is not wholly correct, for, one coin of this type was yielded by the Hajipur hoard (*Bayana Hoard*, p. viii).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

the most popular and supposedly earliest of the types issued by him) but are conspicuously absent on the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type of coins. It may also be noted Samudragupta made *Garuḍadhvaja* the emblem of his dynasty. Now, in the light of these two facts, is it too much to suggest that the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type was issued earlier than the Standard type of Samudragupta ? Of course, it is true that both, the *Garuḍadhvaja* and metrical legends are not found on all the types of the early Gupta coins and, therefore, their absence on the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type cannot be regarded as the conclusive evidence of its being earlier in date than the Standard type of Samudragupta. All the same, it is impossible to ignore the fact that both these features, which became almost usual since the issuance of the Standard type, are conspicuously absent on the coins under discussion.

So, it may be regarded as fairly certain that the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type was issued before the Standard type of Samudragupta. It means that it was issued either during the reign of Candragupta I or in the early years of the region of Samudragupta. Altekar believed that it was issued during the region of Candragupta I by the joint authority of Candragupta and Kumāradevī, respectively the rulers of the Gupta and the Licchavi states. He explained the relative originality of these coins by the political situation created by the marriage of Candragupta with Kumāradevī. "It is quite probable," he argued, "that one of the terms of the matrimonial alliance between the Guptas and the Licchavis may have been that the Licchavi princes Kumāradevī should be not merely a queen consort but a queen regnant. When the coinage was started late in the reign, the proud Licchavis may well have insisted that the name of their clan as well as of their princess should appear on the imperial coinage".[1]

The theory of Altekar, however, is not free from difficulties. As pointed out by Ḍani "leaving aside this hypothetical case there is no other instance of a "joint-rule", of king and queen

1. *Bayana Hoard*, Intro., p. XLIII.

in Indian history nor is it conceived of in any political theory of ancient India"[1]. Further, it may be noted that in ancient India a daughter did not have an immediate right of succession (*apratibandhadāya*), even if her father did not have a male issue to succeed him. In the case of Kumāradevī particularly, we have got no evidence to show that she was regarded as the successor of her father. On the other hand, in the genealogical portions of the Gupta epigraphs, Samudragupta is described as the *Licchavi dauhitra* or the daughter's son of the Licchavi; and it has been shown that in such documents the term *dauhitra* seems to have been used in the sense of *putrikā-putra*—one of the twelve kinds of subsidiary sons.[2] In other words, Samudragupta was probably regarded as a *dvayāmuṣyāyaṇa* i.e. a person having two kinds of parentages—natural and subsidiary. It means that at least technically it was Samudragupta, and not Candragupta I or Kumāradevī, who inherited the state of the Licchavi chief. At the most it can be assumed that Candragupta I administered it after the demise of his father-in-law on behalf of his minor son Samudragupta. If it was so, how could Kumāradevī have been a queen regnant ? And if she was not, how it can be assumed that these coins were issued by Candragupta I and Kumāradevī jointly ?

Thirdly, it may be noted that the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type of coins have not been discovered from Bihar, the region in which the Licchavi state was situated. As we have already noted most of their recorded findspots are concentrated in the eastern U.P. Were these coins the joint issues of both the Guptas and the Licchavis, one would expect them to find in the regions ruled by both of them. Therefore, their almost total absence from Bihar is a strong indication to the fact that they were not the joint-issues of the two states.

The theory that these coins were issued by the Guptas and the Licchavis jointly, is not supported by the evidence provided by the coins themselves. For, one may very reasonably ask if

1. Dani, *JNSI*, XX, Pt. I, p. 7.
2. Pathak, V. S. *JNSI*, XIX, pt. II, pp. 140-41.

the names and figures of Candragupta I and Kumāradevī on the obverse represent respectively the Guptas and the Licchavis the two parties which agreed to merge their states into one, why have only the Licchavis been mentioned on the reverse? If these coins were the joint issues of the two states, one would expect to find the legend *Guptaḥ*, on the raverse alongwith *Licchavayaḥ* corresponding to the names of Candragupta and Kumāradevī on the obverse.

Thus, it is difficult to maintain that the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type-coins were issued by the joint authority of the Guptas and the Licchavis. That they are commemorative medals has been rather convincingly shown by Pathak. He has pointed out that contrary to the time-honoured Indian tradition on these issues Kumāradevī has been depicted to the right of her husband.[1] It means that the royal couple has been shown in the *Vaivāhika* or *Kalyāṇa Sundara* posture. Moreover, in the coins of this type as well as in the King-and-Queen type coins of Candragupta II and Kumāragupta I, kings hold before queens an indistinct object which has been variously described as a ring, a bangle or a *sindūradānī* though in some cases it looks like a bud. Now, *sindūradānī* or a bangale (*vivāhapratisāra*) both are required at the time of marriage. Obviously, therefore, these coins should be regarded as medals issued to commemorate the marriage of Candragupta I with Kumāradevī.[2] V. S. Agrawala has very ingeniously, though rather casually, suggested that they were issued by the Licchavis. According to him the legend *Licchavayaḥ* may be construed as *Licchavayaḥ jayanti* i. e. 'the Licchavis are victorious'.[3] Against this view it has been rightly argued that 'find-spot, devices, metallurgy, conventions and sequence—in fact all numismatic evidences unequivocally point out that it (Candragupta-Kumāradevī coin) is a Gupta issue,

1. *JNSI*, XIX, Pt. II, pp. 135ff. Contra, Dani, A. H., *op. cit.* p. 5.
2. Sohoni (*JNSI*, XIX Pt. II, pp. 148 ff.) believes that the composition on the obverse is not a depiction of a marriage, but a farewell of a ruler proceeding to a military campaign. Earlier he offered a different explanation. (*JNSI*, V, Pt. I, pp. 37-42).
3. *JNSI*. XVII, Pt. I, pp. 117-9.

rather than a Licchavi coin".[1] Further, it may also be pointed out that such a twist in the meaning of the legend is totally unwarranted. There was nothing in the way of the Licchavi mint-masters inscribing the full legend, the idea of which, according to Agrawala, they wanted to convey.

Now we are left with only two possible alternatives : these medals were issued either by Candragupta I or by Samudragupta before the issuance of the Standard type coins. The following facts suggest that the latter alternative is the correct one :

(1) The Standard type coins were issued quite late in the reign of Samudragupta. As pointed out by Allan, they "bear long legends referring to his conquests, and it is therefore probable that they were not struck at the beginning of his raign ; if Candragupta issued coins it would be remarkable that Samudragupta did not immediately continue their issue".[2] Altekar, who maintained that the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type of coins belong to the reign of Candragupta I, assumed that the legend on the Standard type coins of Samudragupta probably refers to the conquests which he won as a crown-prince. But the explanation is not cnnvincing. The legend on the standard type coins *samara-vitata-vijayo* etc. reminds one of the similar description of his conquests (*samaraśatāvataraṇadakṣasya*) given in the Allahabad pillar inscription.[3] Therefore, it appears safer to assume that the Standard type coins were issued after he had achieved his major military successes. In the light of this fact it becomes difficult to believe that Candragupta I had already started minting in gold, for it would mean that Samudragupta, after his accession, did not issue any gold coins for a considerable period. The assumption that he issued Candragupta-Kumāradevī type coins in the early period of his reign does not create such a difficulty.

(ii) The greatest hurdle in this suggestion is the absence of any clue to the identity of the commemorator.[4] To overcome

1. *JNSI*, XIX, Pt. ii, p. 139.
2. Allan, *op. cit.*, p. lxvii-viii.
3. Sircar, D. C., *Sel. Ins.*, p. 256.
4. Altekar, *Coinage*, pp. 28-29.

this difficulty Pathak has suggested that the "obverse legends "*Candraguptaḥ*" and "*Kumāradevī Śrī*', and the device of the marriage-scence may together be taken as meaning "*Candragupta-Licchasya Kumāradevyāmutpannasya*', while the reverse legend "*Licchavayaḥ*" in this association may be construed as *Licchavinaṃ dauhitrasya*. Thus, legends and devices are subtle pointers to the identity of the commemorator".[1] We, however, feel that such a twist in the meaning of the legends is not altogether necessary. Further, as pointed out by Dani, it implies that Samudragupta adopted two family titles simultaneously.[2] It is, therefore, far better to maintain that these medals, commemorating the marriage of Candragupta I with Kumāradevī were issued by Samudragupta himself though not in his own name. It is quite likely that the idea of a son commemorating the marriage of his parents was not to his liking; as pointed out by Jayaswal 'no Hindu would ever think of celebrating the marriage of his father and mother'[3]. It is not logical, therefore, to assume that he issued these medals in the name of the Licchavis, who were, after all, the co-rulers of the empire ?

(iii) That Samudragupta might have felt the necessity of issuing such commemorative medals in the early period of his reign is suggested by the circumstances in which he was selected as the successor of Candragupta I. As is well known, there are strong indications that his accession to the Gupta throne was not to the liking of the princes 'of equal birth'. It is also generally admitted that some of them, probably headed by Kāca, refused to accept him as the rightful successor of Candragupta I. It is quite possible, therefore, to maintain that Samudragupta issued medals in commemoration of the marriage of his parents in order to show that he, being a *dvayāmuṣyāyaṇa*, had a better title to rule over the amalgamated kingdom of the Guptas and the Licchavis, which other princes not connected with the Liccha-

1. *JNSI*, XIX, Pt. II, p. 141. Sohoni also opines that 'there was enough indication left by Samudragupta on Candragupta-Kumāradevī coin type to indicate a reference to him, viz. names of his parents and of a community which had helped him". (*JNSI*, XIX, Pt. II, p. 153.)
2. Dani, *op. cit.* p. 7.
3. Jayaswal, *Hist. Ind.*, p. 91, fn. 1

vis did not have.[1] The issuance of these medals in the name of the Licchavis served the additional purpose of emphasising his relationship with them.

(iv) Our suggestion is in consonance with another rather curious fact. As mentioned above, the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type of coins are not found in Bihar, the region in which the Licchavi state was situated. Now, as these coins were issued to show that Samudragupta had a better title to rule over the amalgamated kingdom, they were mostly circulated in the region where the rebellious princes 'of equal birth' could hope to find some support. The Licchavi state must have been solidly behind him, and therefore he did not feel the necessity of circulating such medallic pieces there. It may here be emphasised that no other alternative can explain the complete absence of the coin in question in the region ruled by the Licchavis.

To sum up, we hold that the Candragupta-Kumāradevī type is the earliest of the Gupta gold coin series and that it was issued not by Chandragupta I but by Samudragupta in the initial years of his reign, to commemorate the marriage of his parents, and to show that he, being a *dvayāmuṣyāyaṇa*, had a better claim to the throne than his rival brothers.

1. **Pathak**, *op. cit.*, **p. 141.**

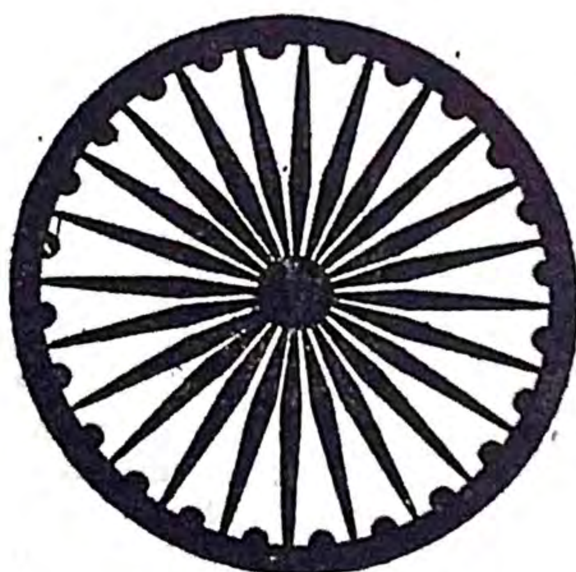
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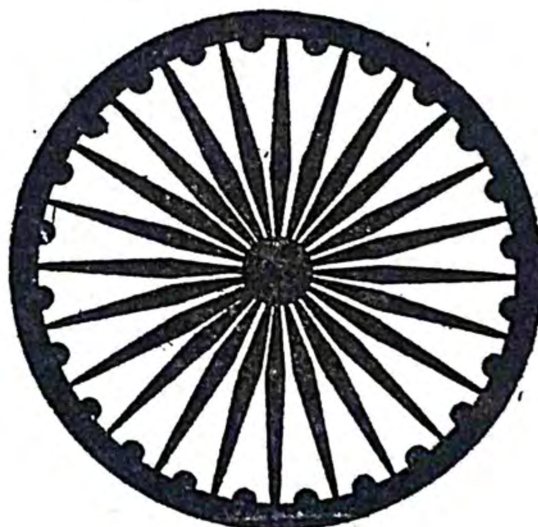
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